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LIBRARY OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

NEWSLETTER

Paul Howard, Chairman
Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups
1709 M Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.

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LABOR EXTENSION BILL TO BE REINTRODUCED...

The Labor Extension Bill will probably be introduced in the 81st Congress early in January. The bill provides funds to educational institutions for encouragement of workers' education programs.

Libraries interested in extension of workers' education would be included among the institutions to receive funds under the bill.

The bill was approved by the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee in the 80th Congress as No. S. 1390.

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CASE STUDY NO. 2

This copy of the NEWSLETTER contains the second in the series of studies of libraries giving special service to labor groups. This study is of the Milwaukee Public Library, written by Ruth Shapiro, Chief, Department of Group Services.

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ANY NEWS?

We would like to receive news of your library-labor activities. The purpose of the NEWSLETTER is to serve as a clearing house of ideas and projects carried out by different libraries. Tell us what you are doing and we'll report it to others.

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Case Study No. 2
Dec. 10, 1948

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR GROUPS
Milwaukee Public Library

By

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HISTORY OF THE SERVICE

Library service to labor groups was started in Milwaukee in the early 1920's. The Library requested and was granted credentials to attend local union meetings to talk to the membership about services which the Library could offer them, including establishment of special library collections at union headquarters.

Officers of the central labor body assisted the Library in selecting books of particular interest to labor. Lists of these books were sent to the trade unions with a letter of recommendation from the secretary of the central labor body.

To develop the service further, a staff member of the Milwaukee Public Library registered for classes of the Milwaukee Labor College -- a school particularly for trade unionists in subjects of special interest to them -- which at that time held its classes in the library building. She was elected as a trustee of the group, thereby being in a position to assist in setting educational policies.

Books were taken directly to classes of the Milwaukee Labor College and issued to those attending.

Deposit book collections were also set up at local union headquarters and places of employment. In addition, a library staff member attended -- and still attends -- meetings of the central labor body, with a collection of books for distribution.

TYPES OF SERVICE PROVIDED

The Milwaukee Public Library's Service to Labor Groups includes the following services:

1. Book deposits are provided at union headquarters when this service is desired. The Library has found that this service is not too successful as most union office secretaries cannot give much time to this service.

2. Through cooperation between union and management, collections of books on labor subjects are deposited at places of employment. In most cases, management furnishes personnel for circulation of these books, but sometimes it is handled by volunteers from the union.

3. Books on particular subjects for use of union members and officials are selected. These topics include time study, housing, public relations, or any subject of immediate interest to the group.

4. A library staff member attends all meetings of the central labor body with a collection of books for distribution.

5. Library assists central labor bodies and local unions in setting up education programs.

6. Exhibits of books, pamphlets, films, records, are prepared for labor institutes and conferences. Among those served have been a state-wide education conference of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the annual meeting of the Mid-West Workers Education Conference, the National Union-Industries Show, sponsored by AFL Label Trades Department, which was held in Milwaukee in 1948, and the Wisconsin CIO Education Conference.

7. Reference materials such as Bureau of Labor Statistics Reports and the labor service of the Bureau of National Affairs are also provided. These services are available in the general Reference Department, but the staff member in charge of work with labor groups examines new materials and keeps the unions informed on what is available.

8. Library collects and maintains all labor periodicals, pamphlets, and newspapers published in Wisconsin, as well as periodical publications of approximately 25 international unions.

9. All available pamphlet material of special interest to labor is collected by the Library.

10. Library cooperates with local, state, regional, and national workers' education groups.

PERSONNEL AND COST OF THE SERVICE

The Department of Group Service, which provides the special service to labor groups, has two members on its staff. However, much of the actual work is handled by people in the various agencies served, who distribute the books.

It is practically impossible to come to any conclusion which would be even approximately correct regarding the cost of the service. There are a number of reasons. First, it is part of a larger service and, because it is an integrated part of the whole library, is actually a method of utilizing to greater extent those other services.

Other members of the library staff are consulted by the member in charge of the work with labor groups, particularly the Film-Sound Center, the Reference and the Social Science Departments.

Then, too, the number and type of displays differs so from time to time that even attempting to strike an average cost over a year would be very inaccurate.

RELATION OF SERVICE TO REST OF LIBRARY

The Department of Group Services serves not only labor groups but all other groups in the community, including churches, industrial plants, commercial establishments, institutions. The Department has a limited book budget for the purchase of recent books of general interest and non-technical books of special interest to labor groups. All books, pamphlets, films, records, and other services of the Library are available through the Department of Group Services.

PLANS FOR FUTURE SERVICE

Future plans for the Department of Group Service in serving labor groups are as follows:

1. Greater exploitation of pamphlet and periodical collections through publicity to labor groups and to students of economics and labor problems. Students of several of the colleges in the Milwaukee area are already using the service.

2. Encouragement of use of films, possibly through establishment of a joint labor-library committee which can help select films and perhaps assist in providing funds for the purchase of films with special labor interest.

3. Continued assistance to labor generally and to workers' education particularly, as it is through education of labor groups, as well as other groups, that the real democratic future of this country and the world can be assured.

EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

It is not easy to judge the effectiveness or value of this kind of service. It cannot be measured by circulation statistics, as the actual numbers of books which circulate are comparatively small.

The value to the unions is to make their officers and their members better informed and more useful members of their unions and the community. The way union officials feel about the service can best be summed up in the statement of an official of an international union, with headquarters in Milwaukee. When visiting in another city the official attended a meeting of the central labor body. He mentioned, with pride, that in his city the library gave special service to labor groups. As he expressed it, "They had never heard of such service!"

Whenever called upon to do so, this official has been willing to add his voice and the influence of his union to any request for service to the library movement.

This goodwill of a large segment of citizens of the city is valuable to the library as a means of extending its services to all groups within the community.

The Labor Extension Bill, which would allow funds to educational institutions for encouragement of workers' education, was approved by the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee of the 80th Congress. It also had the approval of a majority of the House Committee, although it did not come to a vote. The bill was not acted upon because of adjournment, but will most likely be reintroduced in the 81st Congress. If enacted into law, this bill would provide funds for libraries which were interested in the extension of workers education.

With national impetus behind the movement through a joint Labor-Library Committee, the value of the service can be greatly extended with the development of new tools and services.

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